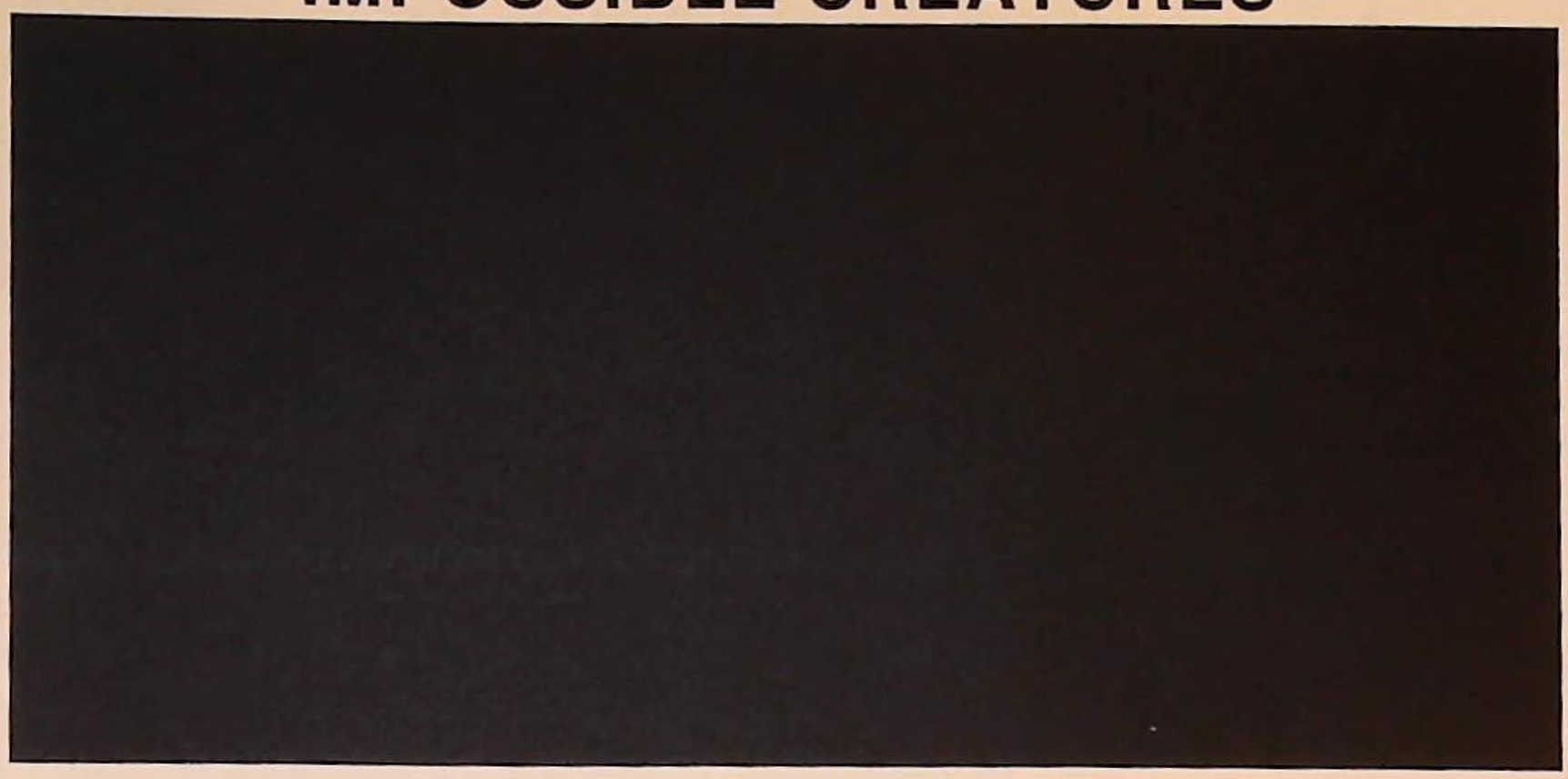
Ireland:
SEARCHING FOR "IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES"



During the 1960s, while so many were preoccupied with The Loch Ness Monster, Capt. Lionel Leslie was probing into the alledged existence o similar creatures over in Ireland.

A brother of Sir Shane Leslie and cousin of Sir Winston Churchill, Cap Leslie was well qualified to make an objective appraisal. He had crossed the Sikkim Himalaya into Tibet and walked over the north-eas frontier from Burma into Yunnan. In 1927 he was a member of the Jimo Watkins expedition to Labrador. He was also a member of the Royal Geographic Society and a seasoned field naturalist.

In the topographical sense an Irish monster was consistent with what was known about the environment of the Scottish creatures.

SMALL LAKES, STRANGE CREATURES

Capt. Leslie narrowed the area of search, first to the province of Connaught, then to the county of Galway and finally to the western p of that county, Connemara. On foot and by bicycle he hunted down the rumours. In rain and shine he trod the bogs to interview cottagers, farmers and peat-cutters. Some knew nothing or were net prepared to talk. Others recalled vague tales handed down over the years. Eye-witnesses were mentioned who - it turned out - had emigrated. B Capt. Leslie kept on, year after year.

I feel great sympathy for this man, a pioneer in a field shuffled under the rug by science and biased scientists. I have trod around many claimed monster lakes myself, scouted many mirrorlike surfaces and dark waters, hoping to catch a glimpse of the large, enigmatic creatures said to inhabit the often murky depths of the lakes.

What than was it that the people on Ireland saw and still see? Well, a few reports from the Green Island goes as follows.

LOUGH CROLAN

Tom Connelly, 65, from Maam Cross a few miles from Clifden on southern Ireland, had seen an unknown animal in Lough Crolan in April 1961. The lake is connected to Derrylea Lough, which in turn is linked to the sea.

"When I first spotted them I thought it was otters, but then I realized that these was much larger and longer", he said. "I was as close as 15 meters and saw that they were 3,5-4 meters long. They were black in colour, had a round pointed head and an eel-like tail. This was 3-3,5 d out of the water. The strange creatures dived, but a few minutes later they were back on the surface again. Old people in the area call them "horse-eels" and say that they move from lake to lake (compare this with what a witness told me in Norway; The Sea Serpent at Lake Seljordsvatnet, indexg)".

LOUGH DUNMANWAY

In June 1963, W.J. Wood, a director of Harte Industries Ltd., Bandon, County Cork, was fishing at Lough Dunmanway. The sun was strong wi a very light south-westernly breeze into which he was fly-fishing w an expectant eye open for rising trout.

"Suddenly and quietly a long dark-brown object surfaced at a distanc of about a hundred yards, facing directly towards me", he said later. had the head of a well-grown calf and large glittering eyes almost at water-level. The distance appeared to lessen and the creature´s approach-angle altered until it was parallel to me and about ninety yards distant. It seemed to be about 10 to 10,5 feet long and protrude above the surface 5 or 6 inches. After about two minutes the animal submerged".

LOUGH NAHOOIN

At about seven in the evening of February 22, 1968, Stephen Coyne we down to the bog by Lough Nahooin to bring up some dry peat. With him took his eldest son, a boy of eight, and the family dog. Although the s had set it was still quite light.

On reaching the peat-bed beside Nahooin he suddenly noticed a black object in the water. Thinking it was the dog he whistled to it. Howev the dog came bounding along the shore from behind. On seeing the obj it stopped and started barking.

He then saw that the object was an animal with a polelike head and ne about nine inches to a foot in diameter. It was swimming around in various directions. From time to time it put its head underwater. Twc humps then came to view. Occasionally, a flat tail appeared. Once this came out near the head which argued length and a high degree of flexibility. The thing was black, slick and hairless with a texture resambling an eel.

The dog´s barking seemed to irritate the monster and it began move inshore, its mouth open. However, when Coyne strode over to support his dog it turned away and resumed swimming around the lit lough. At about this point the little boy ran home to bring his mother see the strange beast. When Mrs. Coyne and the rest of the children returned, the creature was still busily patrolling the lake.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Coyne agreed that the monster was about twelve fee long and both agreed that they saw no eyes. Mrs. Coyne told us that sh noticed two horn-like projections on top of the head. Whereas she thought the thing approched as near as four to five yards, her husbanc felt that the nearest point was about nine yards. Both agreed that the mouth was underslung in relation to the snout and neither of them sa any teeth. Coyne described the mouth-interior as "pale".

To and fro before the seven members of the Coyne family saw the Nahooin dragon. As dusk was setting they finally left it and made the way home over the bog. Sadly no one had a camera, people in these remote areas seldom has and if thet do they almost certainly have no film in it.

Leaving Capt. Leslies remarkable documentation we are now moving i an incident that made such a strong impression on me, that I decided go to ireland myself back in 1975.

THE MONSTER OF SRAHEENS LOUGH

It was 10 p.m. on the night of May 1, 1969, when John Cooney, a 30-year-old football player, and Michael McNulty, a 37-year-old sheep-farmer, was driving towards home from Achill Sound to the village of Keel on Achill Island.

About one km from Achill Sound they passed Sraheens Lough.

Suddenly the two men saw something in the headlights of their car, t would engrave itself on their memory forever. A frighting animal can running to the right of their car and towards the lake, crossed the ro 3-4 meters in front of them and vanished into the thick vegetation on the left side.

McNulty stepped on it. The frightend men didn´t dare to stop u they reached John Cooney´s home in Achill Sound.

The most remarkable with this incident is that the witness accounts gives a close to perfect description of the carnivorous, supposedly extinct dinosaur Coelophysis! This is how Cooney-McNulty, and the paleontologist and author E.H. Colbert, describes a Coelophysis: "It w about 2,5-3 meters long and as fully grown had a weight of 25-30 kil It had a long neck, a narrowing head and a very long tail. Its legs was long and slender and the frontlegs was shorter than the hindlegs. Thi dinosaur was carnivorous".

It is believed to have been around 160 million years ago.

In June 1975, after an intensive correspondance with the Irish consulate in Stockholm and The Irish Tourist Board at Dublin, I left f Achill Island together with good friend and photografer Jerry Tornstrom. We came to a strange island with an almost sub-tropical nature around the lake were a total of seven witness had seen the monster.

Achill, which is the gaelic name for "two forest´s", is the largest island off the Irish coast, 24 km long and 19 km on its wides part. The island is connected to the mainland in County Mayo with a bridge at Achill Sound. The island had in those days 6 000 inhabitants living off sheep and fishing. I don´t think that much has chang even if more than 20 years has passed. The people on Ireland are very conservative.

Achill was an exceptional island in many ways. You could find everything from miles upon miles of untouched beaches with the fine sand you had ever seen, to large, jungle-like swamps with wild vegetation, quicksand and rocky mountains. It felt like you were back time for million of years when you were on Achill Island, and it probably had such a nature that the prehistoric dinosaurs would have liked.

South of Sraheens Lough was a quite hilly mountain range called Knockmore. It contained the oldest species of rocks known, from the precambrian period, an age science knows very little about. Below the 120 meters high mountains, was a two square mile belt of practically inpenetrable rhodondendron.

Sraheens Lough was a spooky place, omnious even in broad daylight an you had the chills every time you were there. It felt like you were beeing watched by the unseen.. Except grazing sheep along the slopes Knockmore, there were no other animals. No one had ever taken a swim in the lake, some 400 meters in circumference, and few fishermens went there. At night the area was pitch black.

Already in the 30´s something described as a "horse" had been seen in the lake. Denis McGowan, who ran a grocery shop at Achill Sou told us about an incident which had taken place in 1966:

"An English angler tried his fishing luck when the usually calm surfa suddenly started to boil. Next a swan-like neck appeared and on top o it a small head turned around, staring at the fisherman!". A dark, glittering body surfaced behind the neck. When the monsterous anima swam towards the shore with high speed, the angler threw his gear down, turned and ran. Sraheens Lough is a good 20 minutes from Achi Sound, but the angler ran all the way. Out of breath and totally terrif he came rushing into McGowan´s store and told Denis what he h seen. And he flatly refused to go back for his fishing-gear.

Three years later, in July 1969, three students arrived to Sraheens

Lough. They had heard about the mysterious creature through the newspapers, and started to search for it with modern equipment. They never had any indication of a monster, but they made another important discovery - namely that Sraheens Lough probably is an extinct volcan

Echosounding the lake they discovered that it was bowl-shaped, with its largest depth reaching 120 meters. The center of the lake could not be measured because of an "incredible deep layer of mud". Old people Achill Sound nodded agreeingly, saying they had always known that the lake was "bottomless".

The students also found something else - strange tracks along the shores that they first thought was from a large otter. Fishermans had not, however, heard of otters or seals in Sraheens Lough. The mysterious tracks was seen again in the autumn of 1973. They had three digits with web in between and were twice the size of a large Labrador dog.

John Cooney was 37 years old when we finally meet him, in the summer of 1975. He remembered the frighting experience as had it happend yesterday.

"The area around the lake is so spooky that many people are reluctant to pass it on foot", he told us. "We. Michael McNulty and I, was luckily in our car. It was shortly after ten at night. Unexpectedly I saw a strange animal that came running or jumping with almost undulating movements, to the right of the car. It crossed three to four meter in front of us, right into the headlights, and vanished into the rhodondendron bushes".

He estimated that the animal was 2,5-3 meters long and one meter high.

"It had a long neck like a swan, not much larger. The tail was long and rather thick. The animal swayed back and forth with undulating movements. It was dark-brown in colour and shiny. The head looked like the head of a sheep or a greyhound".

John Cooney, who seven years earlier had been Achill Island´s great football star, was said to be a thrustworthy man, first by his old teacher Mary Heeney, 72, then by the priest John Fallon. They had known John since he was a handbreath and said his word could be trusted. He neither drank nor smoked and he was willing to take an oath on what he had seen on the road that night.

The same description of the animal was given by another three witnesses. The first of them, and then 22-year old Guy Denver, saw it only one week after Cooney´s and McNulty´s frightning encounter.

"It was shortly after five in the afternoon", said Guy Denver. "I came my bike along the road passing the lough when I heard a big splash by its shore. When I looked towards the lake I saw a strange animal comi out of the water. It was much larger than a horse with a narrowing, sheep-like head, long neck and a tail. It moved like a kangeroo. The frontlegs was shorter then the hindlegs. When it came onto the beach stepped on it as much as I could".

Two days later the monster was seen again.

A 21-year old girl, Bernie Sweeney, and her 23-year old friend, Mary Callaghan, had been on a dance in the village Keel and tried to get a hi home. They managed to stop a car right by Sraheens Lough. When the c stopped Bernie happend to look towards the lake.

A large, black and shiny object was visible in the moonlight as it we through the water with high speed, going from the south part of the l to the north. The girl screemed in fear and was so confused she ran along the road, away from the car she intended to hike with. The car owner got hold of her friend Mary, and asked her what was going on? Mary was to shocked to answer him, all she could do was to point towards the lake. But the mysterious creature had vanished and the motorist only saw a large ring on the surface, "on the side of the lak where the rhodondron is very thick".

The old people on Achill Island never doubted that there was a monst in the Sraheens Lough. Teacher Mary Heeney told us that her parents h warned her from going to close to the lake. "A dangerous animal lives the lake, they said, hunting at night. In the daytime it hid in an underwater cave on the bottom that no human could reach".

Martin Coyne, 68, who had lived at Achill Sound all his life, had also heard about the monster when he was a child. "In the old days they shunned the like like plague", he said. "No one has ever taken a swim i it. But what really bothers us and seems to confirm that there is a monster there, is that sheep is mysteriously vanish from the slopes Knockmore mountain!".

The loss of the sheep had been costly for the farmers in the area. Pat

McGreal had lost sheep for ten thousands of pounds and another sheep-farmer, John Madden, had lost nearly as much. "I can´t sa that a monster took the sheep, but there´s some funny goings o at the lough", said Madden. "The sheep has not fallen down the cliffs. They are very cautious mountain climbers and the only other animals there are badgers. But they are far to shy to attack a flock of sheeps and who have ever heard that bagders should eat sheep?".